

UEP 308

(Re)Designing Los Angeles

Christopher Hawthorne, Chief Design Officer, City of Los Angeles, Office of the Mayor

Spring 2019, Occidental College, Urban and Environmental Policy

Wednesdays 7:15pm to 10:15pm, Johnson 106

NB: Some sessions, as indicated below, to be held at City Hall, 200 N Spring St., Los Angeles, CA 90012, Room 1305. Public entrance to City Hall and security check is on Main Street side at sidewalk level. Bring your ID.

[Christopher.Hawthorne@lacity.org](mailto:Christopher.Hawthorne@lacity.org)

Office Hours: On campus, typically in Johnson. By appointment.

Teaching Assistant: Michelle Levitt, [levittm@oxy.edu](mailto:levittm@oxy.edu)

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

At the city and county level, Los Angeles is investing in new infrastructure, transit lines, housing, open space, and civic architecture to a degree rarely seen and arguably unprecedented in American urban history; the total public money already earmarked through ballot and bond measures and other means is approaching \$200 billion all told over the next several decades — with a significant portion to be spent between now and 2028, when L.A. will play host to the Summer Olympics for a third time. What will these investments mean for the urban fabric, architectural character, and civic identity of Los Angeles? How can they be made in a coordinated, complementary, and efficient manner? How can they promote innovation while also guarding against displacement and the loss of affordable housing and/or the erasure of neighborhood culture and history? The course will be led by Christopher Hawthorne, professor of the practice at Occidental, who after spending 13 years as the architecture critic at the Los Angeles Times was appointed in 2018 by Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti as the city's first Chief Design Officer. Along with reading deeply into the urban and architectural history of Southern California, students will meet in class with Hawthorne's colleagues in city government and hear from key figures involved in shaping L.A.'s built environment and civic future at this pivotal, transitional moment. The class will include three public events during class time, on the evenings of March 6 (off-campus), March 27 (off-campus) and April 17 (in Choi Auditorium). Details below.

**This is a hybrid course, combining elements of a seminar, writing workshop and public-affairs series on the future of Los Angeles.** Its basic goals are twofold: first, to introduce students to various conceptual and theoretical frameworks for understanding Los Angeles (city of quartz, island on the land, reluctant metropolis, third Los Angeles, autopia, vernacular city, e.g.) and by extension to the task of analyzing citymaking and urban change; and second, to help them make sense of the built environment and political culture of contemporary Los Angeles, and proposals for the city's future, against the backdrop of those frameworks. The course will require students to participate in a range of ways, including careful reading and class discussion, help with the three public events during the semester and written assignments.

#### SCHEDULE FOR THE SEMESTER:

##### WEEK 1/January 23

Introduction: You Have to Pay for the Public Life.

Review of syllabus. Discussion of course objectives, assignments, expectations, grading, public events &c. Overview of the Third L.A. framework as a conceptual and theoretical basis for the course and the public events. Los Angeles Plays Itself. The complications of self-image and citymaking in the Dream Factory.

##### WEEK 2/January 30

The First Los Angeles.

Required reading: Selections from: Deverell and Hise, Companion to Los Angeles; McWilliams; Morgan; McCoy.

Recommended: West, Day of the Locust; Mayo, Los Angeles pp. 57-88.

##### WEEK 3/Feb. 6

The Second Los Angeles, Part One: Sunshine.

The city of doing your own thing. The city of freeways, Case Study houses, middle-class lawns and swimming pools. The Stucco Box. Smog.

Reading: Selections from: Chase; Banham; Jacobs and Kelly; McWilliams; Moore; Morgan.

WEEK 4/Feb. 13

The Second Los Angeles, Part Two: Noir.

Class overseen by Michelle Levitt.

The city that saw the L.A. Dream fracture. The city that ate the desert. Uprising 1965, uprising 1992. Beginning to put the pieces back together. In-class: sections of Falling Down and Twilight.

Reading: Davis; Davis Q&A; Deverell and Hise, Companion; Didion; Plagens; Smith.

WEEK 5/Feb. 20

**Held at Los Angeles City Hall, Room 1305.**

The Second Los Angeles, Part Three: L.A. School Architecture. “The city of endless possible selves.” Introduction to the Third Los Angeles. The city folding back on itself.

Reading: Jencks; Steele; Boom Interview; Landscape Architecture magazine. Plus: Artbound episode.

**Presentations on 80s/90s architecture, part one.**

**Weekend of Feb. 23/24: Possible walking tour of downtown sites plus G2 parcel.**

(Recommended reading: Anderton, Frances, ed. Grand Illusion: A Story of Ambition, and Its Limits, on L.A.'s Bunker Hill.)

WEEK 6/Feb. 27

**Held at Los Angeles City Hall, Room 1305.**

Water and Power.

The Los Angeles River. Nature in the city and the city in Nature. Governance.

Reading: Davis; Fulton; Maltzan; McPhee; Weschler. On the river: Deverell and Hise, Eden by Design; Gandy; Orsi; Price.

**Presentations on 80s/90s architecture, part two.**

WEEK 7/March 6

PUBLIC EVENT NUMBER ONE, Barnsdall Gallery Theater.

**Is There an L.A. Sensibility? Placemaking and Placekeeping in Los Angeles.**

Architects, planners, critics and historians often praise works of architecture or urban design for suggesting an authentic sense of place – or knock them for lacking it. Over time, the notion that place should be central to any thoughtful architect’s work has hardened into a kind of conventional wisdom. But what precisely does it mean for a design – of an apartment building, a

park, a Metro line, a bus stop or a 2028 Olympic venue, or even a song or work of art – to reflect the spirit of Los Angeles, or of a specific site or community in the city? Given the long history of rapid change, displacement, cultural amnesia and forward-looking urban design in L.A. and Southern California, these questions can be more fraught and elusive here than in other American cities. (Some architects would even argue that the notion of dislocation itself has been central to L.A.'s design sensibility.) What's more, so-called placemaking efforts in the design of new projects have been rightly criticized of late for a tendency to run roughshod over community or architectural history, giving rise among planners and designers alike to a new phrase that many prefer: "placekeeping," suggesting an effort to balance new design with existing cultural heritage. At the same time, the rise of digital culture increasingly leaves our attention divided between the built environment and the online world, further complicating the relationship between design and physical space even as the online realm has proven to be a uniquely effective vehicle for preserving and reframing culture and memory. This event will launch the newest batch of Third L.A. events — this year devoted to the theme of (Re)Designing Los Angeles — with the goal of helping architects, designers, city officials and community leaders frame the question of place in a more nuanced, productive and inclusive way. Invited guests include Mayor Eric Garcetti, artists Guadalupe Rosales, Rosten Woo, Ed Ruscha and Ruben Ochoa, Occidental professor David Kasunic, writers Claire Evans and Carolina Miranda, City Councilman Marqueece Harris-Dawson, photographer Janna Ireland, architects Frederick Fisher and others.

**Paper #1 due, on Moore's You Have to Pay for the Public Life.**

[MARCH 13: SPRING BREAK. NO CLASS]

WEEK 8/March 20

**Held at Los Angeles City Hall, Room 1305.**

Mobility and the public realm.

Reading: Banham, Chapter 4, 11; Avila; Brodsky; Elkind; [Urban Mobility in a Digital Age](#).

**Presentations on 80s/90s, Part Three.**

WEEK 9/March 27

PUBLIC EVENT NUMBER TWO, Ahmanson Theater, Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, Grand Avenue location.

**Strange Beauty: Understanding and Protecting the L.A. architecture of the 1980s and 1990s**

The city's Office of Historic Resources recently completed an extensive database of cultural and architectural resources, known as Survey L.A. But this effort stops at the year 1980, leaving unmapped the rich collection of architectural landmarks produced between that year and the year 2000. This gap in the historical record is especially striking given the strength and variety of buildings produced during those two decades by architects including Frank Gehry, Charles Moore, Franklin Israel, Craig Hodgetts and Ming Fung, Elyse Grinstein, Julie Eizenberg and Hank Konig, Thom Mayne, Michael Rotondi and many others. The Mayor's Office has begun an effort to map, catalog and analyze these landmarks, with an eye toward extending the Survey L.A. record through 2000. Part of that effort is a public campaign to understand the original aims of these works of architecture, many of which were difficult to appreciate even when they were new because they sought to challenge traditional notions of beauty or architectural context or playfully tweak bourgeois taste. This event will feature presentations from some of those original L.A. School architects as well as critics and historians. Invited panelists include: Craig Hodgetts and Ming Fung, architects; Jeffrey Inaba, architect and critic; Julie Eizenberg, architect; James Rojas, urban planner; Maristella Casciato, Getty Research Institute; Charles Jencks, critic and architectural historian. To be held the Ahmanson Auditorium inside the Museum of Contemporary Art on Grand Avenue downtown, a classic of 1980s Los Angeles design by the late Japanese architect Arata Isozaki.

WEEK 10/April 3

**Held at Los Angeles City Hall, Room 1305.**

Planning, Housing, Growth, Development and Architecture.

Reading: Selections from Davis; Hernandez; Rothstein. Coverage of SB50, Measure S, Measure LV, Minneapolis 2040 Plan.

WEEK 11/April 10

Writing about Los Angeles. Back at Oxy.

Read: George; Gold; L.A. Taco; Miranda; Pastor.

**Paper #2 due: Analyzing SB50 against the backdrop of Los Angeles urbanism.**

WEEK 12/April 17

PUBLIC EVENT NUMBER THREE, Choi Auditorium, Occidental College

**Turn Off the Sunshine: Shade as an Equity Issue in a Warming Los Angeles.** As climate change intensifies and Los Angeles suffers through more days of extreme heat each year, shade is quickly becoming an equity issue of crucial importance in the city. How can Los Angeles fold an interest in providing more shade into policy frameworks that guide the design of streets, sidewalks and storefronts? How can we bring together efforts to increase the street canopy, update street-furniture design and other improvements to create a comprehensive strategy for providing shade where we need it most? How can we distinguish between shade and shadow, which is to say spaces that bring relief from the sun and heat and those which sit in less desirable darkness? Finally, how can designs to increase shade be incorporated into other large-scale planning efforts across the city and region, including Metro expansion, efforts to reimagine the Los Angeles River and the 2028 Summer Olympics? This event — which takes its title from a 1942 collection of short stories about Los Angeles by Timothy J. Turner — will tackle those questions and more. Invited panelists include: Sahra Sulaiman, writer for L.A. Streetsblog and other outlets; Andy Lipkis, founder, Tree People; Jennifer Pope McDowell, Associate Director of Infrastructure in the Mayor's Office of City Services; Claire Bowin, Urban Design Studio, Los Angeles Department of City Planning; and Gerdo Aquino, CEO, SWA Group landscape architects.

WEEK 13/April 24

FINAL CLASS MEETING. Oxy. Students will give progress reports on their final papers.

**Assignments/expectations.** Two short papers on themes related to the course, its readings and the public events: one of 2-3pp, due March 6, and a second of 4-5pp due April 10. One in-class presentation on a work of architecture from the 1980s/90s, given in Week 5, 6 or 8. One final paper of 6-8pp due May 10. Each student will be expected to keep up with the reading and contribute meaningfully to class discussions. Each student will also be asked to contribute to all of the public events in at least one significant way; examples include helping run a social media feed, introducing a speaker, working at the check-in desk, reading a passage onstage or helping promote the events on- or off-campus.

**Grading.** Your grade in the course will be determined as follows:

—Paper #1: 10%

—Paper #2: 20%

—In-class presentation on the architecture of the 1980s/90s: 15%

—Attendance/contributions in class and to panels: 25%

—Final paper: 30%

**PLEASE NOTE:** Though three of the class sessions will be taken up with public events, this will be very much be an academic course, with a good deal of reading required and careful attention paid to the quality of students' research and writing. Your attendance at each class meeting and public event is expected.

**READING:** Selections (posted to Moodle) from some or all of the following.

Avila, Eric. *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City*

Banham, Reyner. *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*

Brodsky, David. *L.A Freeway: An Appreciative Essay*

Chase, John. *Glitter Stucco and Dumpster Diving: Reflections on Building Production in the Vernacular City*

Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*

Davis. *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*

Deverell, William and Greg Hise. *Eden by Design: The 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region*

Deverell, William and Greg Hise. *A Companion to Los Angeles*

Didion, Joan. *The White Album*

Elkind, Ethan N. *Railtown: The Fight for the Los Angeles Metro Rail and the Future of the City*

Foster, Sesshu. *City Terrace Field Manual: Poems*

Fulton, William. *The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles*

Gandy, Matthew. *Riparian Anomie: Reflections on the Los Angeles River*

George, Lynell. *After/Image: Los Angeles Outside the Frame*

Hernandez, Kelly Lytle. *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965*

Jacobs, Chip and William J. Kelly. *Smogtown: The Lung-Burning History of Pollution in Los Angeles*

Jencks, Charles. *Heteropolis: Los Angeles, the Riots and Strange Beauty of Hetero-architecture*

Maltzan, Michael. *No More Play: Conversations on Urban Speculation in Los Angeles and Beyond*

Mayo, Morrow. *Los Angeles*

McPhee, John. *The Control of Nature*

McWilliams, Carey. *Southern California: An Island on the Land*

Moore, Charles. *You Have to Pay for the Public Life: Selected Essays of Charles W. Moore*

Morgan, Susan, editor. Piecing Together Los Angeles: An Esther McCoy Reader

Orsi, Jared. Hazardous Metropolis: Flooding and Urban Ecology in Los Angeles

Pastor, Manuel. State of Resistance: What California's Dizzying Descent and Remarkable Resurgence Mean for America's Future

Rothstein, Richard. The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America

Smith, Anna Deavere. Twilight: Los Angeles 1992

West, Nathanael. Day of the Locust